Mirro announces closings

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330 at city, Chilton sites face layoffs, relocation

By CHARLIE MATTHEWS
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MANITOWOC – A global tidal wave known as "cheap labor" apparently is about to roll over approximately 330 Mirro Company employees.

"Faced with global competition and the need to become more cost efficient," Mirro Company officials announced Thursday plans to close two area plants.

A press release indicated the facilities would include Plant 10, located on Wollmer Street in Manitowoc, and Plant 20, located in Chilton. The plant closings are expected to be completed by July 1, 2001.

A company statement noted that production from these plants will be consolidated into the manufacturing complex on Mirro Drive in Manitowoc or outsourced.

The statement tried to cushion the blow of several hundred salaried and hourly employees losing their jobs.

"Some of the employees, however, may go into other open jobs at Mirro and will have priority for any jobs that open up for which they are qualified," read the statement.

Executive vice-president Bob McCormick is expected to address employees of both plants, as well as employees in Plants 5, 6, 7 and 9, at 1 p.m. today. He did not respond to requests for comments on Thursday.

"There's all sorts of rumors floating around," said one longtime employee who preferred not to be identified.

"I'm not nervous. They just put $2 million into the Mirro Drive complex," she said.

The Mirro Drive facility produces a wide range of "cook sets," while Plants 10 and 20 have been responsible for bakeware, including cooking and

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Over the years Mirro's Plant 10, formerly The Foley Company, has produced a variety of bakeware found in millions of homes.

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baking sheets, and various cake and muffin pans.

Whether those products will continue to be produced in the Lakeshore area, or outsourced remains to be seen.

The company's statement noted that "Mirro is facing global competition, particularly from cookware producers in the Far East."

As the largest remaining domestic cookware and bakeware company, manufacturing experts believe the consolidation effort will allow it to be competitive in the global marketplace.

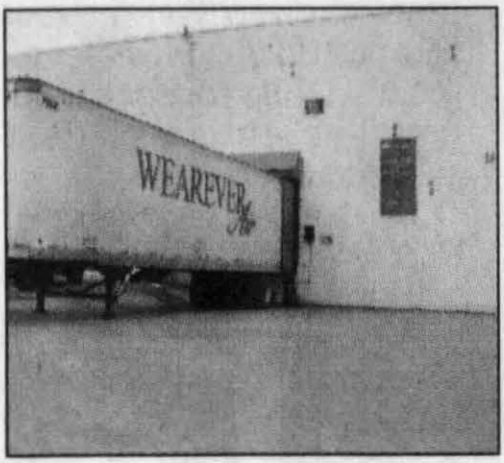
Mirro officials stressed that the plant closings "are not a reflection of the quality and efficiency of its employees." About 1,900 workers are employed at area Mirro plants.

In an interview before he retired, former Mirro President Bill Frieder indicated in 1999 that the shopping habits of Americans were impacting the company.

When it comes to preferentially buying products made in the USA, he said, "We don't always walk the talk as customers.

"The French buy French, the German buy German" to a greater degree of loyalty than Americans do products produced in the 50 states.

On Thursday, Pete Burback of Cooks Corner agreed. Cooks Corner is a major distributor of Mirro products.



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By July 1 there won't be anymore semi-trailers taking bakewear from Mirro Plant 10 to retailers nationwide.

Burback carries dozens of Mirro products and said "I want to buy products made in the United States but it's getting harder and harder to do so."

Burback understands the economic imperative for American companies to manufacture products outside the U.S. "when they're paying $1.50 an hour in Mexico. Ten-year-olds in China are making 10 cents an hour."

He said customers may state they want to buy American but if that translates into higher prices the sentiment evaporates.

Burback walked through his downtown Manitowoc store, noting the country of origin of various items. The Allegro frying pans have Mirro on the label but are made in China.

Burback sees the economic handwriting on the wall that is claiming northeast Wisconsin jobs.

"It's scary ... and I'm not sure where it's going to end."